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## Annie Le Brun

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Translator: Simon Pleasance

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Annie Le Brun © Pauline Goutain, 2020

- 1 To the question : “How did you come to start writing?”, Annie Le Brun replies: “I don’t know, other than that it came from a revolt against the state of the world”.<sup>1</sup> Annie Le Brun is an essayist, poet and critic, born in Rennes in 1942. She lives in Paris in a small fortress made of books, which include a countless family of authors, artists and like-minded thinkers—Sade, Alfred Jarry, Raymond Roussel, Toyen, Victor Hugo, Robert Desnos, and the Art brut authors, to mention just a handful. From her first collection of

poem, *Sur le champ* (Paris: Ed. surréalistes, 1967) to her latest works, *Ce qui n'a pas de prix : beauté, laideur et politique* (Paris: Stock, 2018) and *Un Espace inobjectif : entre les mots et les images* (Paris : Gallimard, 2019), Annie Le Brun has been advocating a poetic, aesthetic, impassioned and political vision of the world. The same intransigence, the same insubordination, and the same 'intake of air' [as she calls it: *appel d'air*—an off-the-beaten-track approach], inform all her writings. In this respect, she remains faithful to the Surrealist spirit, a movement in which she was involved since her meeting with André Breton in 1963, until it broke up in 1969. In a context dominated by Structuralism and "French theories", Surrealism, for her, was the only movement that "raised the real questions".<sup>2</sup> It is these self-same questions that she attempts to rephrase with regard to the present-day state of our society. How are we to dodge too much reality? How can we avoid becoming confined by the numbing limits of a world ruled by commodification and mediocrity? Desires, dreams, imagination, the infinite and the obscure are all keys she wields to open up other horizons for us. In *Appel d'air* (Paris: Plon, 1988; republished in 2011, without shedding a drop of oxygen), she reiterates the imperative: "Live", which she had issued twenty years earlier in a 1968 essay titled "Vivent les Aventuristes!"<sup>3</sup>, determined to fight against the dragooning of moralizing values.

- 2 With *Les Châteaux de la subversion* (Paris : Jean-Jacques Pauvert ; Garnier Frères, 1982), Annie Le Brun exhumed the dark side of the Enlightenment by analysing the *roman noir* or "thriller", a genre forgotten by literary history, but given pride of place by the Surrealists. In *Soudain un bloc d'abîme, Sade*, (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1986), invited by Jean-Jacques Pauvert to write a preface to the Marquis's complete works, she proposed a total re-reading. Sade's œuvre, in her own words, invites us to make a journey from which we will not emerge unscathed. To understand it involves "a dizzy tumble into the depths of individual obscurity"<sup>4</sup>, and a "physical shake-up".<sup>5</sup> Under the aegis of Victor Hugo, *Si rien avait une forme, ce serait cela* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), she challenges conformist society's false pretensions to freedom, and brings back to centre stage the imaginative power of the *noir*.
- 3 The posthumous publication of *A tout rompre* (2011) by Radovan Ivšić —a Croatian writer and poet with whom she shared her life—and the exhibition *Radovan Ivšić et la forêt insoumise* (2015)<sup>6</sup>, organized by Annie Le Brun, illustrate the "demand for dreams"<sup>7</sup> that kept them together. Their relationship probably explains Annie Le Brun's special connection with eastern Europe. The Surrealist artist Toyen (Marie Čermínová), in particular, illustrated her collections *Sur le champ* (1967), *Tout près, les nomades* (Paris : Maintenant, 1972) and *Annuaire de lune* (Paris : Maintenant, 1977). With her and Radovan Ivšić, she co-founded the Maintenant publishing house in 1972. The Croatian artist Slavko Kopac, who opened up the Art brut collection held by Jean Dubuffet in Rue de Sèvres, also has a significant place in her writings on art. She defended his "magic matter"<sup>8</sup> and "wild elegance".<sup>9</sup> For Annie Le Brun, words and images are not separate. Visual art underpins her writing, and *vice versa*. With its selected texts, *Un Espace inobjectif* demonstrates this close relation.
- 4 With her insatiable spirit, Annie Le Brun also contributed to several exhibitions as curator, including *Les Arcs-en-ciel du noir: Victor Hugo* (2012)<sup>10</sup> at the Maison Victor Hugo and *Sade : attaquer le soleil* (2015)<sup>11</sup> at the Musée d'Orsay. She took part in the exhibition *Cibles* (2013)<sup>12</sup> at the Museum of Hunting and Nature, as part of the Year of Croatia. Without losing their strength and their meaning, Annie Le Brun's writings, most of

which have been re-published, urge us to cast a spell again on the daily round by way of imagination, love and poetry, even if this means always running the risk of the *éperdu* or “desperate”.<sup>13</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Annie Le Brun's words from an interview with Pauline Goutain in Paris on 15 February 2020
2. *Ibid.*
3. A manifesto published in the Surrealist review *Archibras*, no.4, June 1968
4. Le Brun, Annie. *Les Châteaux de la subversion* followed by *Soudain un bloc d'abîme*, Sade, Paris : Gallimard, 2010, p. 319, (Tel)
5. *Ibid.*, p. 320
6. Le Brun, Annie. *Radovan Ivšić et la forêt insoumise*, Zagreb : Museum of Contemporary Art; Paris: Gallimard, 2015. The book was published in association with the similarly titled exhibition held in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb from 24 September to 22 November 2015.
7. Neveu, Olivier. “Préface”, in Ivšić, Radovan. *A tout rompre* (1985), Paris : Gallimard, 2011, p. 12
8. Le Brun, Annie. “Slavko Kopac ou la matière enchantée”, *Slavko Kopac*, Zagreb : MGC- Klovcevi Dvori, 1997
9. Le Brun, Annie “Slavko Kopac ou la sauvage élégance de l'être”, *Cimaise*, no.160, October-November 1982, p. 65-76
10. An exhibition held from 15 March to 19 August 2012. Le Brun, Annie. *Les Arcs-en-ciel du noir : Victor Hugo*, Paris : Gallimard, 2012
11. An exhibition held from 14 October 2014 to 25 January 2015. Le Brun, Annie. Descars, Laurence. *Sade : attaquer le soleil*, Paris : Musée d'Orsay ; Gallimard, 2015
12. An exhibition held from 20 December 2012 to 31 March 2013. Le Brun, Annie. Titeux, Gibert. *Cibles*, Paris : Gallimard, 2013
13. Le Brun, Annie. *De l'éperdu*, Paris : Gallimard, 2005